

City's News Release

For Immediate Release

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City Releases Recommendation on Route for Eastern Transmission Line

The City of Tallahassee today announced staff will recommend to the City Commission that a vastly needed new transmission line in the eastern part of the city be placed along a route that primarily utilizes the Mahan Drive corridor. The recommendation follows 18 months of citizen input, review of environmental considerations and associated land use factors.

The route, identified as Route A, would begin at the city's existing substation near Apalachee Parkway and Capital Circle Southeast, travel along existing electric easement through Tom Brown Park, along Weems Road, then east on Mahan Drive to a new substation to be built near Mahan and Mystic Warrior Trail (just east of the I-10 exchange). This is the route overwhelmingly preferred by the citizens in the area who attended public workshops and shared their comments online.

"There is no question that we need this transmission line and a new substation to meet service and reliability needs in eastern Tallahassee," said Kevin Wailes, general manager of the city's Electric Utility. "The growth and development over the last decade has meant a corresponding demand for electricity and we are approaching the maximum of our capabilities to serve this area reliably. The challenge was to find the best route taking into account the character of the community, environmental issues, and community concerns and preferences."

While the City Commission initially approved the construction of an overhead transmission line along Mahan Drive on June 13, 2001, the construction was postponed in order to receive citizen input and have an independent route study conducted. The city hired EDAW / Exponential Engineering Company to conduct the study, which

identified 33 potential routes. That list was narrowed to six highest-ranking routes following community input both at meetings and through the city's website. The final report from the consultant recommended Route N, which travels along the CSX railroad line, behind the Buck Lake Neighborhood and then north to Mahan near I-10. (Route N had not previously been recommended by the consultant, but it is very comparable to route AD that was one of the six highest ranked routes.)

"The consultant did what we asked in terms of providing an independent analysis," said Wailes. "But quite honestly, we found the majority of citizens favored the Mahan Route (Route A) in large part because it is a major highway that already has overhead electric lines. Many of the other routes near Buck Lake Road traversed through land seen as more rural that were not currently impacted by overhead electric lines."

Wailes said Route N also presented liability problems with placing the line on railroad right of way, and would require the city to condemn significantly more property for the new line than Route A. That route is proposed to be built on existing right-of-way, with the exception of 450 feet near Weems Road.

City staff is not recommending any portion of the line be placed underground, due to both cost and reliability issues, caused by the extensive process to repair underground transmission lines when there is not an alternate source of power. The cost to provide overhead transmission lines for Route A is \$5.4 million. To place the Mahan portion of the line underground would increase the cost to \$35 million. Underground trenching also requires significant tree removal and environmental impacts to create the large concrete trenches to carry the transmission line. Photos of underground transmission line projects are available on the city's website at talgov.com. "We are committed to making the proposed line as unobtrusive as possible," said Wailes. "The line will consist of "single-pole" construction, instead of multiple pole structures or metal towers, and we're allowing trees within 10 feet of the line, whereas our normal standard is 20 feet for transmission lines. We want to be sensitive to preserving the look and feel of the area."

The issue will be presented to the Tallahassee City Commission on December 10. The city has mailed 7,600 postcards to citizens in the area, is airing a segment on the proposed line on the Tallahassee Matters program on WCOT Channel 13, and has extensive information on the project on the city's website at talgov.com. Citizens can also use the website to provide additional comments, the results of which will be shared with City Commissioners prior to the vote on the project in December. "We've worked from the beginning to make this a process where citizen input was a key factor," said Wailes. "Our recommendation is the route we think best serves the community and we're delighted that it is also the route most favored by those living in the area who provided input into the process."

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